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## SOME TABOOED AMUSEMENTS.

Sermon Delivered by Rev. Cruzan Sunday Evening.

Text, I. Cor., 7:31—And those that use the world as not abusing it. (The Greek word translated "abusing" means literally using to the full, going to excess in.)

Here is a great principle: God has put man in this beautiful world fitted to supply the needs of his many-sided nature. Man is free to use every good thing, only let him beware of excess.

I want to apply this common sense life rule to amusements, especially to cards, dancing and the theater, which are so sternly tabooed by some Christians.

Good men differ radically as to the right of indulgence in these amusements. One cause for this difference is that, as that bright Methodist, Rev. Edward Eggleston, in his "Roxy" says, we have inherited our opinions from the Puritans. "There may have been good reason in the time of the Stuarts, when amusements and vices were so interwoven that it was impossible to separate them, for wholesale prohibition. This self denial on the part of the Puritans was so akin to religion that it came to be identified with it. When the crisis that drove the Puritans to their extreme position passed away, there was left a set of prohibitions all interwoven with religion, but forming no essential part of it and having no basis in reason or clear thought."

Christians have come to see this, and the most marked change in religious life in the last fifty years has been the revolt against these outworn Puritan prohibitions. Against the stout protest of a dwindling minority who still cling to these seventeenth century tabus, the great mass of Christians have asserted their freedom to use amusements. Two things have led to this change: A new view of religion. The Puritan regarded religion as a restriction, a prohibition, a policeman standing in the way of life to shut and open doors. We have learned that religion is not a set of rules but an inspiration—not a repression but a bringer-in of freedom, of enlargement; that whatever is not evil in itself is for our use, but not to excess. But a still more potent force working to bring about this revolt is the changed conditions of life. Recreation is a necessity to our highly organized, driving, nerve-wearing life. The Puritan life was simple, the pace slow, the wear and tear slight. He did not need play; we must have it, or we break.

You may deplore it but the great mass of Christians have broken away from the old inherited Puritan strictness. The Methodist stands alone among the great churches in retaining a rule prohibiting card playing, dancing and the theater, and at the last General Conference an attempt to repeal that rule had the support of a respectable minority.

In view of the fact that the great mass of Christians have claimed their right of freedom of conscience in the matter of amusements, what is the wise thing for us to do? We should make sharp and clear distinctions. It is still easy for one so inclined, to set up his conscience as the universal standard, and try to enforce the old Puritan prohibitions. It is easy, but useless. It is much more difficult to make clear and sharp distinctions between the innocent use and the harmful abuse of popular amusements. Unless our restrictions rest on reason they will have no weight.

This is not always the case. We make distinctions sometimes where there is no difference. For example, dominoes can be found in many homes where cards would be looked upon with horror. Why? "Cards are games of chance." So are dominoes. "Cards are gambler's tools, and are found in saloons." So are dominoes; you can find men gambling with them in every low dive. Many card games can be played with dominoes. In a certain district in these islands a short time ago there was a series of domino parties where the game of euchre was played, and the minister, an earnest, devoted, spiritual young man, entered into them heartily. It was all right, because

the game of euchre was played with dominoes. But if he had played the same game with cards wouldn't it have been awful! It seems to me that we ought not to make any such senseless distinctions; and that it ought to be easy to see that while excessive card playing, to the neglect of one's work, or the squandering of time, or the playing for any stake is wrong, a game now and then in the home circle, or with friends, may be harmless recreation.

And just so in regard to dancing. I have heard of this argument against dancing: Herodias danced and pleased Herod; because her dancing pleased Herod he granted her petition; she asked for the head of John the Baptist; John the Baptist lost his head through dancing; therefore dancing is a sin! This is about as logical as the argument for dancing: David danced before the Lord; therefore I can dance until 4 o'clock in the morning! We forget that David danced without a partner. I suppose the veriest Puritan would not object to the young men of Hilo dancing in that way, for he would be sure they would not carry it to excess.

There is dancing and dancing. It certainly ought to be easy to discriminate between dancing all night, and dancing for an hour or two; between the promiscuous dance of the public ball room, where a pure girl may be whirled around the room in the arms of a libertine, and the quiet, seemingly dance of the home circle, or the private party, made up of known friends.

And so also in regard to the theater: Call a play a charade, rig up a temporary stage in a church lecture room, have the play poorly or indifferently acted by amateurs, and it is all right! But to go to a theater and witness a clean play well acted is awful!

As Rev. Wolcott Fay, of Boston, says: "There are theatres and theatres, plays and plays, and actors and actors. All are not alike. There are theatres careful to admit nothing indecent. There are plays pure, elevating, healthful, stimulating—plays that impress the nobility of honesty, the value of chastity, the beauty of domestic life, and the folly, curse, and punishment of sin. Such plays never degrade, they uplift. They are sermons. What a preacher Shakespeare was! There is as great a distance between a play like Hamlet, or Macbeth, or The Old Home-stead, and scores more that could be named, and The Black Crook as there is between a work of Thackeray or Dickens and a vile French novel. We discriminate between novels; why not between plays? Because we will not corrupt the imagination with the rottenness of bad novels, do we argue that it is a sin to read good novels?"

Our grandfathers did—and even a later generation put all novels under the ban. I never saw a novel in my father's house; I doubt if he ever read one until after he was fifty. Well do I remember, thirty years ago, the sharp reproof of a good deacon who found me reading "John Halifax, Gentleman." "What! you, a Christian! reading a novel! You'd better read your Bible!" It was not many years ago that the novel was under the ban just as emphatically as the theater. Now Christian people have learned to discriminate—to place the ban only on the impure and the trashy, and to use the

(Continued on page 6.)

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